

would have disagreed with my friend on the issue of dealing with radical Islam, but it's one of the things that brought the two of us together. He and I, over the last decade-plus, have spent a great deal of time talking about that and other international policy issues.

But if one looks at the series that he wrote in *Vanity Fair*, as he was diagnosed with cancer, they are very, very powerful. And, again, Christopher Hitchens and I didn't agree on every issue, but I always enjoyed the exchanges and the time that I was able to spend with him and, of course, have been fascinated by his works. I think that the world is a better place for Christopher Hitchens having lived and, obviously, we're saddened by his passing.

I want to say to his wife and daughters that our thoughts—I hesitate to say prayers when it comes to Christopher—go to him, because he was a very committed atheist; but I will say that our thoughts and, since we have them, our prayers are with the members of the Hitchens family, and to say that his works, because he was such a great writer, will continue for years and years to come to fascinate and intrigue and create the kind of intellectual curiosity that is necessary.

I just would like to say that I am saddened by the passing of my friend, Christopher Hitchens, and certainly have had my life improved and bettered by his having lived.

Ms. JACKSON LEE of Texas. I thank the gentleman from California. I think his presence on the floor indicates our bipartisanship and thank him for raising those comments about Christopher and our knowledge about him as well.

Let me also indicate my concern and sympathy to his family. That speaks to my point of coming together and being able to share and yield to a gentleman from the other party. As I do so, I would indicate that's how we should go forward as we come back to vote positively on the payroll tax extension next week and stay here until it is done and, of course, the unemployment insurance, but going forward in 2012 to answer some of the cries of many of those who have taken to our streets throughout America who have asked us about jobs, the Occupy Movement, that have been just Americans. I just call them Americans, who have taken up the constitutional privilege of petitioning their government.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make a commitment that our work will be focused on action and make the second part of the 112th Congress equal to what we did in the 111th with pay parity, with the GI Bill, with the affordable health care bill, and so many other items that were so valuable to this country, and when I say that, legislative initiatives.

Let me also say to the American public and our local communities, I know you think someone else is calling or emailing, but this is what democracy is all about. We want to hear from you on these issues of how we come together,

not how we come together, but the importance of doing so and working on issues and whether or not you appreciate the concept of where there is benefit, there is burden, there is sacrifice, whether or not you think it's important that there are not homeless veterans or soldiers who are coming back who can't work, whether or not we want to encourage our corporations that have this massive cash on hand to realize what a wonderful, patriotic Nation that they live in, and to be able to work and ensure that we have the ability to do the job that is necessary to be done.

I know that Mr. HOYER was coming to the floor, so let me just say to Mr. HOYER, who will be coming to you in just awhile to, again, assure the working people of America that this Congress will have the payroll tax extended and the President will sign it as we note that he has said every day that he wants to sign it and will sign it.

Let me say to the unemployed, I know that the unemployment insurance allows you to pay your mortgage and to pay your rent and to pay your necessities, but let me say to you that we are looking to create jobs, more jobs in America. And I expect to be introducing legislation that will help the energy industry reduce the deficit, repair our coastal waters and our ecosystems, make sure that we are responding to the loss of wetlands and the deterioration by hurricanes that have come on that gulf region there to restore the healthy fishing waters but, as well, to develop our natural gas and the ability to utilize the present expiration that generates resources for the American people.

This is a season of giving, and I only want that America be known as a benevolent Nation, but strong and powerful in her values and, of course, respecting her military, but the military, based upon a civilian-led government that focuses on democracy, equality, and justice. And I say to my colleagues, let's come back here next week to finish our job; but 2012, let it be the no name-calling session. Let us focus on what we do for others, what we do for Americans; and let it not be as a progressive or a conservative, but let it be as an American. That's the call for this Nation: to come and stand as an American.

Mr. Speaker, it has been my privilege to share my thoughts with my colleagues, and I hope that as this legislation will be signed by the President, although it has had a very difficult journey, and I would have wanted a more expanded debate, we are glad that we are serving America. Let us be prepared to roll up our sleeves to do so in the coming early days of 2012.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I yield back the balance of my time.

□ 1530

WORDS OF WISDOM AT CHRISTMASTIME

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 5, 2011, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOHMERT) is recognized for 30 minutes.

Mr. GOHMERT. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the comments of my colleague from Texas, my sister in faith. I know we get carried away sometimes in worrying about different bills. There's a lot to be concerned about. But looking at our Nation's history, from whence we've come gives us a better glimpse of where we should be going.

At this time, as Congress has for decades, many, many generations, we are about to have a Christmas recess. And so, though we're used to in here debating back and forth, fussing back and forth, because of the season and also with due deference to the things my friend from Texas said, it is important to take note of who we are and our history, just as our Founders did.

I've got a book here, William Federer, just a wonderful gentleman. He's put together so many great books. This one is called "Prayers and Presidents: Inspiring Faith From Leaders of the Past." It's noteworthy.

I was 4 years in the Army, and I never saw an order like this, but right now we're debating whether or not chaplains should be forced to marry people when they know in their hearts it violates their Christian teaching, their Christian beliefs, and our Constitution was not supposed to do that. It's interesting to note that the order from the Commander in Chief of the Revolutionary military, May 2, 1778, to the troops at Valley Forge was as follows:

The Commander in Chief directs that divine service be performed every Sunday at 11 o'clock in each brigade which has a chaplain. Those brigades which have none will attend the places of worship nearest to them. It is expected that officers of all ranks will, by their attendance, set an example for their men. While we are zealously performing the duties of good citizens and soldiers, we certainly ought not to be inattentive to the higher duties of religion. To the distinguished character of Patriot, it should be our highest glory to laud the more distinguished character of Christian.

That was the order of George Washington in 1778 to our troops.

It's also worth noting that when he did what no man has ever done in the history of the world before or since, that was lead a military in revolution, win the revolution, and then tender his resignation and go home, in essence saying, I've done what you ask, you gave me all power. I'm giving it all back.

At the end of that resignation was a prayer, and I'll read part of the prayer from George Washington. This was 1783, June 14. At the end of his resignation were these words:

Almighty God, we make our earnest prayer that Thou wilt keep the United States in Thy holy protection.

And finally that Thou wilt most graciously be pleased to dispose us all to do justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that charity, humility, and pacific temper of mind which were the characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed religion, and without a humble imitation of whose example in these things we can never hope to be a happy Nation.

That was George Washington in resigning as no one had done before. In fact, King George, when he was told Washington was resigning, didn't believe him. He didn't believe that that would happen. He said nobody would do that. In fact he said, If Washington were to do that, he would be the greatest man alive. He was. He was indeed.

It is also noteworthy, because in figuring out where we're going from here, and especially in this Christmas season, we need to know where we came from. 1789, George Washington said this in writing:

May the same wonder-working Deity who, long since delivering the Hebrews from their Egyptian oppressors, planted them in the Promised Land—whose providential agency has lately been conspicuous in establishing these United States as an independent Nation—still continue to water them with the dews of heaven and to make the inhabitants of every denomination participate in the temporal and spiritual blessings of that people whose God is Jehovah.

George Washington.

There may be the gentleman from Maryland that follows me. If not, these may be the last Special Orders before the Christmas break. And I think with all of the debate that goes back and forth, this is critically important to note who said what while we were being founded.

Thomas Jefferson said these words in 1781, and it's inscribed on the Jefferson Memorial:

God who gave us life, gave us liberty. And can the liberties of a Nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God, that they are not to be violated but with His wrath. Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, that His justice cannot sleep forever.

Think of those words, as I know that in the county right next to my home county there are people, a group, Freedom From Religion, that is doing all they can to have a nativity scene removed that is a part of the history of Athens, Texas.

Thomas Jefferson also said these words: "I am a Christian in the only sense in which He wished anyone to be, sincerely attached to his doctrines in preference to all others."

Jefferson said: "I shall need, too, the favor of that Being in whose hands we are, who led our forefathers, as Israel of old, from their native land and planted them in a country flowing with all the necessities and comforts of life."

I was on Fox News last week with my friend, Eric Bolling, had a gentleman

from Wisconsin who was saying Christians are a hateful group, that it is a hate religion, not understanding our history, not understanding this observation at this time of year. Not so much that we designate surely December 25 was the day when Jesus was born, but that it has been traditionally a date where we remembered his birth.

James Madison had plenty to say. In part, in one of his national day of public humiliation and prayer proclamations, he said:

If the public homage of a people can ever be worthy of the favorable regard of the holy and omniscient Being to whom it is addressed, it must be guided only by their free choice, by the impulse of their hearts and the dictates of their consciences, and such a spectacle must be interesting to all Christian nations as proving that religion, that gift of heaven, for the good of man.

Abraham Lincoln, September 5, 1864, said in regard to this great book, talking about the Bible:

I have but to say, I believe the Bible is the best gift God has given to man. All the good Savior gave to the world was communicated through this book. But for it we could not know right from wrong. All things most desirable for man's welfare, here and hereafter, are to be found portrayed in it.

□ 1540

So it's interesting that now, in a place where so many Christian groups came to avoid persecution, we're about to come full circle. Now we have people, groups like just in the recent days, who are on television, telling me, as a Christian, that I'm a member of a hate group?

He understands not what Washington understood, what Jefferson understood, what Madison understood. And how about the only President to have ever been elected to Congress and been elected President and to have been appointed to the Supreme Court? In fact, he was Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. He was William Howard Taft.

William Howard Taft, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, said these words in 1908:

No man can study the movement of modern civilization from an impartial standpoint and not realize that Christianity, and the spread of Christianity, are the only basis of hope of modern civilization in the growth of popular self-government.

Our only Member of Congress, who was also President, who was also Chief Justice, said this:

The spirit of Christianity is pure democracy; it is the equality of man before God—the equality of man before the law, which is, as I understand it, the most Godlike manifestation that man has been able to make. William Howard Taft.

Franklin D. Roosevelt said these words on December 24, 1933, because he believed the Christian religion not to be a hate religion, as so many are now saying, as so many are trying to persecute. It is also important to understand this was in a terrible time of a depression.

Franklin D. Roosevelt said this:

... this year marks a greater national understanding of the significance in our mod-

ern lives of the teachings of Him whose birth we celebrate. To more and more of us, the words 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself' have taken on a meaning that is showing itself and proving itself in our purposes and daily lives.

May the practice of that high ideal grow in us all in the year to come.

I give you and send you one and all, old and young, a Merry Christmas and a truly Happy New Year. And so, for now and for always, 'God bless us every one.'

The words of Franklin Roosevelt.

In 1941, just 2 weeks exactly after the horror of Pearl Harbor's sneak attack, Franklin Roosevelt said this:

Sincere and faithful men and women . . . are asking themselves this Christmas: How can we light our trees? How can we give our gifts? How can we meet and worship with love and with uplifted spirit and heart in a world at war, a world of fighting and suffering and death?

Franklin Roosevelt went on:

How can we pause, even for a day, even for Christmas Day, in our urgent labor of arming a decent humanity against the enemies which beset it? How can we put the world aside, as men and women put the world aside in peaceful years, to rejoice in the birth of Christ?

Franklin Roosevelt went on:

Looking into the days to come, I have set aside a day of prayer, and in that Proclamation, I have said: 'The year 1941 has brought upon our Nation a war of aggression by powers dominated by arrogant rulers whose selfish purpose is to destroy free institutions. They would thereby take from the freedom-loving peoples of the Earth the hard-won liberties gained over many centuries. The new year of 1942 calls for the courage . . . Our strength, as the strength of all men everywhere, is of greater avail as God upholds us.

Therefore, I . . . do hereby appoint the first day of the year 1942 as a day of prayer, of asking forgiveness for our shortcomings of the past, of consecration to the tasks of the present, of asking God's help in the days to come. We need His guidance that this people may be humble in spirit but strong in the conviction of the right; steadfast to endure sacrifice and brave to achieve a victory of liberty and peace.

Our strongest weapon in this war is that conviction of the dignity and brotherhood of man which Christmas Day signifies . . . Against enemies who preach the principles of hate and practice them, we set our faith in human love and in God's care for us and all men everywhere.'

A year later exactly, Franklin Roosevelt said:

To you who serve in uniform, I also send a message of cheer that you are in the thoughts of your families and friends at home and that Christmas prayers follow you wherever you may be. To all Americans, I say that loving our neighbor as we love ourselves is not enough—that we as a Nation and as individuals will please God best by showing regard for the laws of God. There is no better way of fostering good will toward man than by first fostering good will toward God.

Then Franklin Roosevelt quotes from John 14:15:

"If we love Him, we will keep His Commandments." In sending Christmas greetings to the Armed Forces and merchant sailors of the United Nations, we include therein our pride in their bravery on the fighting fronts and on all the seas.

It is significant that tomorrow, Christmas Day, our plants and factories will be stilled. That is not true of the other holidays we have long been accustomed to celebrate. On all other holidays, work goes on gladly—for the winning of the war. So Christmas becomes the only holiday in all the year. I like to think that this is so because Christmas is a holy day. May all it stands for live and grow throughout the years.

It might be worth hearing from John Kennedy, December 1962, which was approximately a year before he was assassinated. John Kennedy said these words at this season, at this time:

With the lighting of this tree, which is an old ceremony in Washington and one which has been among the most important responsibilities of a good many Presidents of the United States, we initiate, in a formal way, the Christmas season. We mark the festival of Christmas, which is the most sacred and hopeful day in our civilization. For nearly 2,000 years, the message of Christmas, the message of peace and good will towards all men has been the guiding star of our endeavors . . . I had a meeting . . . which included some of our representatives from far off countries in Africa and Asia. They were returning to their posts for the Christmas holidays. Talking with them . . . I was struck by the fact that in the far-off continents, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, as well as Christians, pause from their labors on the 25th day of December to celebrate the birthday of the Prince of Peace.

Kennedy went on and said:

There could be no more striking proof that Christmas is truly the universal holiday of all men. It is the day when all of us dedicate our thoughts to others; when all are reminded that mercy and compassion are the enduring virtues; when all show, by small deeds and large and by acts, that it is more blessed to give than to receive. It is the day when we remind ourselves that man can and must live in peace with his neighbors and that it is the peacemakers who are truly blessed. In this year of 1962, we greet each other at Christmas with some special sense of the blessings of peace.

This has been a year of peril, when the peace has been sorely threatened. But it has been a year when peril was faced and when reason ruled. As a result, we may talk at this Christmas just a little bit more confidently of peace on Earth, goodwill to men. As a result, the hopes of the American people are perhaps a little higher. We have much yet to do. We still need to ask God to bless everyone.

□ 1550

And then finally, I was asked last year to write a story, a personal story, about a previous Christmas season. I would like to share that. It can be found at Human Events, entitled, "Answered Prayer," from December 25, 2010.

Mother had become so very impulsive. You never knew what she might do next. This brilliant woman in her younger years had put herself through Baylor University in less than three years while working full-time, was a member of an Honor Society, and had spent most of her professional life as an eighth-grade English teacher.

She had prided herself on being able to solve almost any puzzle, answer most any question, and now it was she who was puzzled by lots of things. She got disoriented, and was going crazy thinking she might be going crazy. In fact, a local doctor in our small town in east Texas told Dad if she got much worse, she might need to be put in a home or institution. That drove her even crazier. Amidst the other perplexing conditions, she

thought she was not hearing out of one ear, but that was a minor thing so she did not pursue answers for a long time.

Eventually she decided to go the 60 miles to Longview, Texas, to have a hearing check-up with an ear, nose, and throat specialist named Dr. Norman, whose only other contact with our family was about 14 years earlier when he diagnosed a hearing problem for me when I was 8 years old. He ran tests and did x rays of Mother, but was baffled. He said she had lost most of her hearing in her right ear, and he expected to find a small tumor in her inner ear, but the x rays showed there was no tumor at the normal spot. She had a hearing loss, but he had no idea why. She went home feeling that at least there was something wrong with her that was not psychosomatic.

Nonetheless, her depression, anxiety, loss of balance, impetuosity all kept getting worse, and she knew it. As fall was heading toward Christmas, Mother was heading for disaster. That was what she feared most, as did my father, my older sister, Susan, my two younger brothers, David and Bill, along with me.

Several months after her office visit with Dr. Norman, my brilliant mother was overwhelmed in a way none of us could help. This smart woman who read all of us Bible stories from our earliest days, who loved to recite poetry from memory, jokes and stories, was now having trouble from time to time remembering some of those—and it was not just age taking its toll on this 50-year-old mother.

One night, my mother could not sleep, which was not unusual, but she got on her knees to pray. This was a regular habit for this staunch Christian, a Southern Baptist, in fact. But that night it was in complete desperation and hopelessness. She prayed in essence: 'Lord, You know I would not take my own life, but I cannot live another day like this. I cannot go on. You have to do something. Please help me!'

My youngest brother, Bill, was the only sibling still living at home. He said he awoke, got up, saw a light on, and went to the living room. He saw Mom and worriedly asked, 'Mother, are you all right?' She said, 'Yes, son. I'm fine. Go on back to bed.' He did. She prayed a while longer, eventually drifting down the hall to fall in bed beside our father.

The next morning, Mother, not having to teach that day, slept late until the phone rang. Since Dad was already at work, Mother answered. It was the ear doctor, Dr. Norman, who had seen her once many months before but with whom there had been no contact since. He said, 'Mrs. Gohmert, this is Dr. Norman over in Longview. I woke up in the middle of the night thinking about you, and just wanted to call and see if your problems had gotten any better.' Mother told him, no, she had actually thought she was worse. He said that is what he had awakened thinking, and he wanted to send her over to a neurologist friend of his at Baylor Hospital in Dallas and just let him run tests until he figured out what was wrong.

Mother and Dad did not have a lot of money then, but they readily agreed to do just that. Dr. Norman was not a friend of the family, had not seen Mother in many months, did not have common friends with our family, but he was provisionally usable and awoke with Mother on his mind!

Almost a week of testing, and nothing showed until they tried a new machine—new at that time—called a CT Scan. It revealed a small, walnut-sized tumor just inside the skull above her left ear. Mother was elated when she told us the results. We were all heartsick, but not Mother. She was so excited because she knew it was a physical problem; she wasn't just going crazy. What was more, she knew, as we all did—God had answered her prayer. From there, she could handle whatever happened.

The doctor at Baylor, concerned about the sensitive area of the brain in which the tumor was located, referred her to a neurosurgeon friend at the Mayo Clinic. Again, she and Dad did what they had to, with surgery scheduled shortly after Christmas. When the neurosurgeon went in, he found the tumor was more grapefruit size, involved a great deal of the brain, and could not be removed entirely. We were told later it would grow back in maybe a year, maybe 20, no one would know. Mom felt that was OK, too.

And through it all, she found her amazing sense of humor again as well. In fact, her surgeon was quite concerned that he had traumatized nerves or parts of her brain that could have materially affected her abilities. He told the nurses it was imperative that he watch her come out from under the anesthesia so he would have a better idea of the damage that might have occurred. He was alerted and was standing at the foot of Mother's bed when she opened her eyes, which then met his eyes. He asked, 'Do you know who I am?' Mother looked at him for a moment and then said, 'If you don't know who you are, you're worse off than I am!' Mother still had her sense of humor.

It took 15 years for the tumor to grow back big enough to take her life, and the last few years were tough. Half of her face did sag a bit, causing many to think Mother might have had a stroke. But that too did not matter as much as the fact that Mother's prayer had been answered. She, and we all, had a God who listened to our prayers, and answered them.

Christmas was rather special that year. It was before her surgery, so none of us knew what lay ahead for Mother or our family from there. But everyone seemed a little closer, loved a little deeper, hugged a little longer, had fewer squabbles, and appreciated everything a little more.

Two thousand years after God gave us Jesus, He was and is still in the business of answering prayer, just as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Presidents throughout our history—Abraham Lincoln on up to the present day—have acknowledged.

Mr. Speaker, as so often occurred in the first 100 years of this country's history in this building, I will close with a verse of scripture, as so many in Congress used to do.

□ 1600

Psalms 116:1-2:

I love the Lord, because He has heard my voice and my supplications; because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live.

Merry Christmas. Happy holidays to others who are offended by Merry Christmas. As Franklin Roosevelt said: God Bless Us Every One. Merry Christmas.

I yield back the balance of my time.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA APPROPRIATIONS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 5, 2011, the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) is recognized for 30 minutes.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I come to make a few remarks about the 2012 omnibus appropriations conference report